



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**SOUTH PROVIDENCE FACTORY COMPLEX RECOGNIZED:
BEAMAN AND SMITH COMPANY LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

A South Providence mill complex has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture and industry. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Beaman and Smith Company factories to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. With two buildings demonstrating early steel-frame and reinforced concrete construction, the Beaman and Smith Company exemplifies the industrialization of South Providence and the national role of Providence-area precision machine manufacturers.

The Beaman and Smith complex consists of two attached industrial buildings located at Gordon and Saratoga avenues on a one-acre lot in an industrial and residential district on the south side of Providence. Designed and built by the Berlin Iron Bridge Company (of Berlin, CT), Building 1 (1898) is a one- and two-story, steel-frame building with brick curtain walls and a shallow gable roof. The erecting room on the first floor was served by an electrical overhead crane, and the second floor provided space for a pattern shop (front) and machine shop (rear). There are two

additions: a one-story brick wing on the north used for steel storage and a boiler room and one-story brick connector between the main plant and a former pattern storage building.

Building 2 is a narrow, four-story, flat-roof, reinforced concrete structure attached to the south wall of Building 1. This early (1917) example of flat-slab concrete construction marked a departure from the earliest forms of concrete building construction that drew from the column, beam, and girder structural systems of steel framing. There are large steel-frame windows with 4- or 8-light hoppers and paired windows with 9/9 double-hung wood sash. Building 2 housed an office on the first floor, machine shops on the first and second floors, storage on the third floor, and a drafting room on the fourth floor.

The two partners who would form Beaman and Smith got their start in southern New England manufactories. Born in Worcester, MA, Elmer A. Beaman (1846-1921) learned the machinist's trade in his hometown, relocating to Providence in 1866 to work at Star Tool Company. George H. Smith (1851-1934) was born in New Britain, CT and served as a draftsman and later chief draftsman at Brown and Sharpe. In 1886, Beaman and Smith formed a partnership for the manufacture of precision machine tools. The company set up shop in leased space in the newly-built Charles Perkins Building in South Providence.

From 1887 to 1898, the company built a national clientele, specializing in the manufacture of large-scale, specialty milling and boring machines and the attachment of direct-drive electric motors to this machinery. In 1898, Beaman and Smith contracted with the Berlin Iron Bridge Company in Berlin, Connecticut, to design and construct a highly innovative industrial plant, incorporating steel-frame construction and the use of electricity for power and lighting. Little is known about the early 20th-century output of Beaman and Smith. The company's 1893 "B" catalog shows seven specialty milling machines, four drilling and boring machines, two boring machines, and two engine lathes.

There was no significant expansion of Beaman and Smith's plant until 1917, when the company built a four-story, reinforced concrete building (Building 2) attached to the south wall of

their existing plant. The concrete construction used the technique of Minneapolis engineer C.A.P. Turner: an elaborate system of concentric and diagonal reinforcement bars in the slab and distinctive flared “mushroom” column capitals. By eliminating girders to support the floors, this system provided more usable space, greater window heights, and more natural illumination.

Elmer Beaman died in 1921, and the company went out of business five years later. The plant appears to have been vacant until 1931, when it was occupied by James Hill Manufacturing Company, a manufacturer of metal containers. Hill used the property until 1971, when APCO stationers consolidated the former Beaman and Smith property with the Federal Lithographers (the successor to Providence Lithograph) property to the south. The Beaman and Smith buildings have been vacant since about 1990. The Providence Community Health Centers is planning to rehabilitate the buildings using state and federal preservation tax credits.

The National Register nomination for Beaman and Smith Company was prepared by preservation consultant Edward Connors. According to RIHPHC executive director Edward F. Sanderson, “The Beaman and Smith Company factories were important to Rhode Island’s nationally significant machine tool industry. Today, the rehabilitation of these and several other historic South Providence factories using historic preservation tax credits is helping to revitalize the neighborhood.”

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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